

FRANCHISING:

Engaging with Community, Online and Off, Is Crucial to Success

THE WORLD INCREASINGLY HAPPENS ONLINE, AND BUSINESSES THAT DON'T ENGAGE WITH THEIR CUSTOMERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA ARE CEDING PIVOTAL GROUND.

The virtual world also allows companies to flourish in ways they might not otherwise. Totally Nutz is a 28-year-old mobile event company that sells fresh roasted cinnamon glazed nuts on-site. They utilize social media to tell customers what sporting event, fair/festival or other event they are working that day. "Totally Nutz is the fresh and healthy alternative people are looking for when attending events," says Director of PR and Marketing Jennifer Aldrich.

By contrast, there's Kumon, a supplemental education company that launched in North America 35 years ago and is slowly expanding its online presence. "We don't offer online learning," says Tom Kuczek, manager of franchise recruitment for Kumon North America. "All our franchisees are required to be in a retail facility. That strengthens our position for being a brick-and-mortar store." Kumon's core commitment is giving students a foundation in both math and reading. But the times are a-changing, and Kumon is adapting: It joined Twitter and Instagram in March, to help increase engagement. "We were noticing a lot of parents posting



proud pictures of their kids and their achievements, but we weren't on Instagram, so we couldn't be tagged," says Kuczek.

Great Clips, a hair salon company that has given 106 million haircuts over the past 36 years, knows firsthand the importance of having an online presence. "The average customer comes in every 47 days to get a haircut," says president Rob Goggins. "We see them in person and interact with them for 15 minutes or so. Most retailers don't have that sort of intimate experience with their customers." Great Clips views social media as a way to stay in touch with their customers in between fresh cuts.

Franchisees often live in the communities they serve, and are financially and personally invested in their companies' success. "The

franchisee that lives in that community has to go to church with their customers and see them at the local coffee shop," says David Hicks, CEO and president of the HomeVestors, aka We Buy Ugly Houses. "What they do in the community is important to them, because they live there, too."

Running a business as a franchisee requires deep personal commitment, and emotions can run high. "It's amazing, some of the stories our franchisees tell about closings, when they buy a house and the seller comes and hugs the franchisee because they really helped them out of an ugly situation," says Hicks.

Kumon instructors are no strangers to emotional connection, either. Kuczek says the company's instructors are often invited to their students' graduations; some are even invited years later to their weddings. Those bonds are tightly woven, indicating a strength within the community that endures over time. ●



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